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The Spy War

BROKAW: The Danilooff-Sakharov case does demonstrate the intensity of the spy war underway between the United States and the Soviet Union. And as NBC's Anne Garrels reports tonight, there is more to this case than just the arrest of these two men.

ANNE GARRELS: From inside this mailbox, the eyes of the FBI monitor who comes and goes at a Soviet recreational complex in the United States. the FBI won't comment on the presence of the video camera. But this is a symbol of the Reagan administration's new determination to thwart espionage.

Pointing to the United Nations, officials say Soviet spying has increased geometrically in recent years.

The Danilooff-Sakharov crisis may well have grown out of an attempt by both sides to test the rules of espionage, to test each other's resolve. The use of Sakharov, a non-diplomat, is called one of the most frequent examples of Soviet spying. And when the FBI arrested Sakharov, U. S. officials knew there was a risk the Soviets might retaliate. At the U. S. Embassy in Moscow, CIA and American military officers were warned to keep a low profile.

Before he retired, Harry Rostizke was in charge of the CIA's Soviet operations. According to him, the Soviets thought arresting Danilooff was simply fair play in the spy game.

HARRY ROSTIZKE: Moscow probably takes a very simple view of this, and that is that their man Sakharov was set up by the FBI feeding him controlled information and leading him to a spot where they could arrest him. They, therefore, would probably say that their giving classified information to Danilooff and then arresting him on the spot was an exact equivalent.

GARRELS: The arrest of Danilooff was a warning to the U. S. to stop entrapping their spies. The FBI does lure Soviets into traps, most recently the Soviet military attache who was expelled in June. Officials say Sakharov trapped himself.

American officials say that while the Soviets don't observe any niceties in the way they spy, they're now trying to dictate the rules by which the U. S. fights back. To give in, American officials say, would be to say to the Soviets "You can do whatever you want."

Anne Garrels, NBC News, Washington.

BROKAW: Because of charges that many Soviets in this country really are spies, the United States has demanded that Moscow next month begin cutting its U. N. staff by 40%. But today, Moscow's chief U. N. delegate indicated that that demand would be ignored. He called it illegal and contrary to a Soviet-American agreement.